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SUBJECT: JERZY BUZEK: POLAND'S KINDER, GENTLER FACE IN THE EU

REF: WARSAW 345

Classified By: Political Counselor Dan Sainz for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Soft-spoken and respected in Strasbourg and Brussels, former Polish PM Jerzy Buzek is a leading candidate to become European Parliament president after the June 7 elections. Buzek's conciliatory, intellectual approach -- widely considered his greatest liability during four years (1997-2001) as prime minister -- has been his greatest asset as a Member of the European Parliament. While the success of his bid for EP President may ultimately depend on the outcome of alleged horse-trading between PM Tusk and Italian PM Berlusconi, Buzek's proven ability to engage in dialogue and to achieve compromise have helped him to build a strong reputation and influence within the EU. Buzek is the only post-1989 Prime Minister of Poland to serve a full four-year term. END SUMMARY.

QUICK RISE TO NATIONAL PROMINENCE

12. (SBU) The self-effacing Buzek was not widely known in Poland prior to his appointment as prime minister in 1997. A Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) candidate from Gliwice, Buzek fared poorly in that year's parliamentary elections, winning only 1,488 votes. Buzek, who chaired AWS's group of economic experts and played a lead role in drafting AWS's political platform, was instead elected to the Sejm from the party's national list. Buzek's trusted friend, AWS chairman and founder Marian Krzaklewski, tapped him to be prime minister of the AWS-Freedom Union (UW) coalition government. Throughout Buzek's four-year tenure, his conciliatory approach prompted allegations of timidity and indecisiveness, as well as speculation that Krzaklewski was really in charge.

13. (SBU) Accusations of weakness notwithstanding, Buzek is the only post-communist prime minister to serve out his full four-year term. During Buzek's premiership, Poland joined NATO and began accession negotiations with the EU. Buzek's cabinet enacted major reforms in four areas: education, pension, local government, and health. The reforms were wildly unpopular. After UW's withdrawal from the coalition in late 2000, Buzek led a minority AWS government through the final year of his term. Deepening inter-party divisions led a number of post-Solidarity factions to break away from AWS in 2001. Rivalries within the party, along with a series of corruption scandals, spelled the end of AWS in that year's parliamentary elections -- the party failed to pass the threshold for parliamentary representation.

UNPOPULAR PM BECOMES POLISH 'AUTHORITY' IN BRUSSELS

14. (SBU) Despite low popularity when he left office in 2001, Buzek, running under the Civic Platform (PO) banner, received 173,389 votes in the June 2004 election for European Parliament (EP) -- the highest number received by any candidate. Far from the political retirement many in the

media predicted, Buzek has undergone a political rebirth in Strasbourg. He is considered one of the most prominent and active Polish MEPs. He serves on the EP's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Cooperation Committee. He was also elected the EP's rapporteur for the 2007-2013 research framework program, to which the EU has allocated 50 billion euros. A chemical engineering expert whose research has focused on developing technology to limit air pollution, Buzek played a key role in crafting the EP's climate and energy package. Many within the GOP consider him the unofficial spokesman for Polish interests on climate and energy. "Parliament Magazine" named him MEP of the Year in 2006 in the field of scientific research and technology.

THE RACE FOR EP PRESIDENT

15. (SBU) PM Tusk, eager to show Polish voters that the GOP can get things done in Europe, put Buzek forward as Civic Platform's candidate for EP President in late 2008. After Germany's CDU/CSU pledged to support Buzek, he seemed set to split the EP Presidency's five-year term with German Socialist Martin Schulz, under the terms of an informal power-sharing agreement between the European People's Party (EPP), with which PO is aligned, and the Party of European Socialists (PES) faction. In late April, current European Parliament President Hans-Gert Poettering (CDU/CSU) endorsed Buzek to be his successor.

16. (C) Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi threw a wrench in the works earlier this year when he sent a letter to national delegations of the EPP stating former Italian FM Mario Mauro,

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an MEP since 1999, would be his People of Freedom (PDL) party's candidate for the Presidency. (NB: Italy's PDL and Poland's PO are currently jockeying to become the second-largest party within the EPP faction, after Germany.) After his April 28 visit to Warsaw, Berlusconi claimed Tusk had promised to support Mauro in exchange for Italian backing for former PM Wlodzimierz Cimoszewicz's bid to be Council of Europe Secretary General (reftel). While Tusk and others within the GOP have dismissed Berlusconi's statement, media continue to speculate that Tusk may have agreed to give up the largely honorific position of EP President in exchange for Italian support for appointing a Pole to a major economic Commission directorate.

QUIET, CHARISMATIC SOLIDARITY LEADER

17. (SBU) Jerzy Buzek, a Lutheran, was born in 1940 near Cieszyn (on the Czech border). He graduated from the Mechanics and Electrical Energy Department of Silesian Technical University in Gliwice and went on to become a professor of technical sciences and director of research at the Gliwice Chemical Engineering Institute. He also holds a professorship at the Opole Technical University. In 1971-1972, he worked at Cambridge University in England. Buzek joined Solidarity in 1980 and rose quickly within the movement, chairing the Union's first national congress in 1981.

18. (SBU) Following the imposition of martial law in December 1981, Buzek joined Solidarity's national underground leadership as head of Silesia regional executive committee. Buzek was one of the few Solidarity leaders not imprisoned on December 13. He was interviewed by security apparatus (SB) authorities, who instructed him to abandon his union activity. Disregarding SB instructions, Buzek took charge -- temporarily -- of Solidarity's underground structures in Silesia, until his imprisoned colleagues were released in 1983. Buzek remained active in Solidarity, albeit behind the scenes, throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

COMMENT

19. (C) During four years as prime minister, Buzek's proven ability to engage in dialogue and to achieve compromise was regarded as a sign of political weakness. What was once -- and largely still is -- considered a liability in Poland has proven to be an asset in Strasbourg and Brussels. Buzek clearly knows how to play to this strength. Whether or not he is selected to lead the European Parliament, Buzek has built a strong reputation and will continue to hold sway within the EU. His star may even be on the rise in Poland. He is increasingly mentioned as a potential candidate for president of Poland in 2010 -- either against PM Tusk or, more likely, as PO's candidate if Tusk decides, for whatever reason, that a PO victory is far from certain.

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